

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AGRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SAB-02 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /066 W

-----109651 241054Z /15

R 232015Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6254

INFO PANCANAL

USCINCSO

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PN

SUBJECT: CANAL DEBATE IS NOT BIG NEWS IN AZUERO

1. THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR VISITED THE AZUERO PENINSULA (HERRERA AND LOS SANTOS PROVINCES) MARCH 20-22. TO THE PEOPLE AND EVEN THE LEADERS IN PANAMA'S OUTBACK, THE DEBATE OVER THE CANAL TREATIES IS A DISTANT BUZZ--IMPORTANT, BUT CLEARLY THE KIND OF PROBLEM PANAMA CITY (AND NOT THE PROVINCES) SHOULD BE CONCERNED WITH. GRINGOS, IMPERIALISM, NATIONALISM--THESE ARE NOT STAPLES IN THE VOCABULARY OF THE LOCAL FOLK.

2. MOST AZUERENSES WANT TO SEE THE TREATIES APPROVED; THEY VOTED FOR THEM LAST OCTOBER BY A PROPORTION HIGHER THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE. BUT FEW SEEM TO THINK THE TREATIES WOULD MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE IN THEIR LIVES. THEY ARE CONCENTRATING ON HOLY WEEK PROCESSIONS, THE SUGAR HARVEST AND OTHER WORKADAY EVENTS. THEY ARE EXCITED ABOUT AN UNUSUAL MARCH RAINFULL, ABOUT THE PROSPECT OF A NEW FOOD-PROCESSING PLANT IN LOS SANTOS, AND THEY ARE DEPRESSED OVER THE PRICE OF SUGAR AND BEEF.

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3. THOUGH THE VISIT WAS TOO BRIEF TO ALLOW FOR MORE THAN AN IMPRESSION, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT TORRIJOS AND HIS GOVERNMENT ARE REASONABLY POPULAR IN THESE TWO PROVINCES. THE QUALITY OF LIFE HAS IMPROVED SUBSTANTIALLY FOR MANY PEOPLE OVER RECENT YEARS; AND IN ANY EVENT THE AZUERENSES HAVE FEW ILLUSIONS AS TO WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THEIR GOVERNMENT.

JORDEN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DEBATES, CANALS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978PANAMA01966
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780130-0270
Format: TEL
From: PANAMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780332/aaaabatx.tel
Line Count: 63
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 58bbd7be-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3225416
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CANAL DEBATE IS NOT BIG NEWS IN AZUERO
TAGS: PINT, PN
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/58bbd7be-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014